

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December, 21 2004

**STATE STEM CELL INITIATIVES ARE NOT A
REPLACEMENT FOR AN IMPROVED FEDERAL POLICY**

Dear Colleague:

We would like to share with you the column on the reverse side of this Dear Colleague, which appeared in the New York Times on December 15, 2004. It discusses the considerable momentum that continues to grow in support of embryonic stem cell research. The public's voice was heard on Election Day when California voters approved Proposition 71 to fund such research at historic levels. Other states are working on similar legislation.

While this is good news for the research, it does not replace the need to expand the current federal embryonic stem cell research policy. Without a coherent federal policy, this research will progress inefficiently and slowly. All of the scientists and Nobel Laureates we have spoken to emphasized the importance of the National Institutes of Health directing embryonic stem cell research. It is important for the researchers to have a consistent funding stream and nationally directed oversight, collaboration and peer review.

The National Institutes of Health has an annual budget of \$28 billion and is making great strides in all forms of life-saving research, yet its hands are tied from implementing an improved embryonic stem cell research policy. The policy announced by the Bush Administration in August 2001 no longer is suitable for the science in 2004. So many advancements have been made since that time -- from the isolation of more uncontaminated lines at Harvard University to the development of disease-specific lines at the Chicago Fertility Clinic to the work on nuclear transfer in South Korea. It is clear that restrictions on the current policy must be lifted so that the science can prevail.

In Congress, the bipartisan support for embryonic stem cell research is evidenced by the more than 200 Representatives and 58 Senators who signed letters to the President in support of expanding the current federal policy. In addition, more than 190 of you have joined us as cosponsors of the "Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act."

We will continue to work to ensure that the full potential of stem cell research is explored. For more information or to cosponsor the "Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act" in the next Congress, please contact Elizabeth Wenk with Rep. Castle (5-4165) or Meghan Taira with Rep. DeGette (5-4431).



DIANA DeGETTE
Member of Congress

Sincerely,



MICHAEL CASTLE
Member of Congress

California's Stem Cell Gold Rush

WASHINGTON

The person to watch in American medical science today is a California real estate developer named Robert Klein II. As the driving force behind the initiative to invest \$3 billion in stem cell research over the next decade, the builder-financier has just been nominated by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to head the citizens' committee overseeing the state's Institute for Regenerative Medicine.

Here we have federalism in action, with states competing to lead the central government in creating national policy. When the government in Washington decided to move cautiously in funding this promising but controversial scientific research, individual states saw the competitive opportunity and made their move.

Californians voted 3 to 2 to pour \$300 million a year for a decade into embryonic stem cell research — 10 times the current rate of federal support — in hopes of finding treatments or cures for a variety of diseases. Unless regeneration degenerates into a boondoggle, the state will thereby become the global center for such advanced research.

Wisconsin, where researchers may have been the first to isolate and grow human embryonic stem cells, was "galvanized and focused" by the California challenge, said its governor, Jim Doyle. He promptly proposed spending \$750 million to bolster his state's biotech industry.

New Jersey's new acting governor, Richard Codey, whose state was early in endorsing stem cell research, says he will invest \$9.5 million in his state's new research institute, and he is trying to boost that in a consortium with Pennsylvania and Delaware.

That would provide those Eastern states with a way to keep local scientists from pulling up stakes to join what California's lieutenant gover-

nor, Cruz Bustamante, hails as "this century's gold rush."

And not just government money is mining this new field. Harvard researchers have doubled the score of lines of embryonic cells already available at the National Institutes of Health with funds from the university's own deep pockets and from the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

This burgeoning state activity tells us that the controversy about some uses of cells from frozen human embryos discarded by fertility clinics is being leapfrogged. Never "banned," such research is openly under way; the train has left the station; the tiny blastocyst is out of the petri dish.

The moral issue of destroying potential lives to save actual lives may be dealt with by scientists who are not in conflict with ethicists. Adult stem cells may turn out to be more adaptable to regeneration than some now think. And in recent weeks, we learned of experiments to harvest viable cells from embryos that have no potential for life — the ethical equivalent of an organ transplant.

Dr. Leon Kass, chairman of the president's bioethics panel, told *The Washington Post* that such advances would raise the possibility that "the partisans of scientific progress and the defenders of the dignity of nascent human life can go forward in partnership without anyone having to violate things they hold dear."

We all wish. But the looming issue is cloning. Not reproductive cloning; most scientists reject that odious goal, with its danger of monstrosities and designer genes that end human individuality, and there ought to be a law against it.

Therapeutic cloning of cells for the worthy purpose of curing disease, however, troubles people who fear the slippery slope leading to attempts to clone human beings. A majority of Americans disagree with the slippery-slopers, and come down on the side of running that danger in the hope of finding cures.

I'm with the hoppers on this, and also hope President Bush opens his mind to the medical scientists' patient-oriented, pro-living position.

If he does not, the U.S. will devolve on today's federalist trail, going to a state-by-state, local-option, privately supported competition to determine guidelines for ethical stem cell research.

That would be no disaster; private mores and local codes, debated on the Internet and at the kitchen table, would ultimately create a national consensus on genetics, as it has been doing on attitudes toward abortion, health care and sexuality.

But there is some urgency for those needing medical breakthroughs in a few years. For that reason, it would be good for the president and Congress to get out in front of California's stem cell gold rush. □

**That's good,
but watch out
for 'designer genes.'**
